

Residential Management of Forest Tent Caterpillars

When the first signs of defoliation occur or there is a mass of the Forest Tent Caterpillar on a branch, limb or trunk of the tree, you can manually remove them with an apparatus that does not damage the tree (Flat ruler, scraper etc). A strong spray of water will also detach the insects off the affected area. Although the caterpillars may climb the tree again, the more this manual removal is performed it will decrease the numbers that may get in to the higher foliage of the tree.

Another course of action that can be taken is to use a biological application to manage the Forest Tent Caterpillar. It is recommended that for the management of the Forest Tent Caterpillar that Btk (*Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*) is used. Btk is a natural microbial insecticide (bacteria) that is environmentally safe, nontoxic to humans, other mammals, and non-target organisms.

Btk can be purchased at most garden centers or stores that carry residential insecticides. There are different versions of Bt, so be sure to pick the one that has Btk on the label and has Tent Caterpillars as an insect that is controlled. Also, be sure to follow the label exactly, including use of any recommended Personal Protective Equipment. Mixing any insecticide stronger than the label lists will not make it more effective.

When the first signs of leaf damage are noticed or the insect is seen on a tree, apply the Btk to the entire tree canopy. Spraying the insects directly will have no effect. The caterpillars will ingest the Btk as they feed on the leaves, and will succumb to the bacteria approximately 5 days later.